

## **Status** by **Hopping Mad - Chrissy**

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**Summary:** Joyce & Jim finally discuss their feelings for one another. ["Joyce..." he gave her a squeeze and kissed the top of her head. "I'm not going anywhere, ever again. I'll always be here for you." "But..." she prompted.] Rating for language.

# 1. Chapter 1

**Title:** Status

**Description:** Joyce & Jim finally discuss their feelings for one another. ["Joyce..." he gave her a squeeze and kissed the top of her head. "I'm not going anywhere, ever again. I'll always be here for you." "But..." she prompted.]

**Authors Note:** This is SO not my kind of story. I don't even know why, or how I wrote this. I'm not normally the soppy type! But hell, there are not enough Jopper fics on here. It's set probably 5-6 months post the Snow Ball.

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## Chapter One:

The easiest house to reach, with the least amount of danger for El was the Byers. If he were honest with himself, he was relieved on more than one level. Not only did it mean he didn't have to worry about El sneaking off to hook up with her boyfriend Mike – but it also meant he got to visit Joyce.

This Saturday evening was no different than the last three, except that for once he had arrived at the Byers' house before Joyce herself. Will opened the door with a flourish before Jim had even removed his boots, and El rushed in giving Will a hug.

"Will!" She exclaimed, so excited you wouldn't know they had only visited three days before, to help Jonathan fix a leaky pipe in the roof.

"El!" Will responded, equally excited. "Guess what? Mum got me a new video this week. Want to go watch it? She said we could!" Jonathan was in the lounge fiddling with the television set and Jim gave him a quick hello before heading into the kitchen to start dinner. He was pleased that for once he could do the cooking, Joyce could come home and just kick up her feet after a long shift at Melvald's.

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Joyce felt a small smile grace her face as she arrived home. She could certainly get used to seeing Jim Hopper's dirty work boots set tidily by her front door mat, amongst the children's hastily removed trainers. She slipped off her own shoes and reminded herself that despite the domesticity of the past few months, it didn't mean she should allow herself to get used to it. Eventually Hopper would find himself a lady, and he was pretty sure any girlfriend of his would not approve of him spending so much time with Joyce. Plus, they had a bit of an odd friendship, she certainly wouldn't think a girlfriend of Jim's would approve of the amount of physical contact she currently required from him. She blamed the need for his lovely all-encompassing hugs, the gentle hand on her lower back, or the soft kiss on the top of her head... on her anxiety. If she were honest with herself, there has always been a spark between the two of them. This spark as a teenager either left them fighting like cats and dogs, hooking up under the school bleachers, or in later years – frantically removing one another's clothes in the backseat of his dad's ford.

She felt a blush rise to her face at the memories. She could usually push them aside, but she had to admit they were rising to the surface of her mind more and more of late. She wasn't sure if it was due to the last years ordeal, or whether it was because she and Hopper were spending so much more time together – because of their children being such great friends, *of course*.

"Hello," she called as she stepped through her front door. She heard a chorus of Hello's from Jonathan, Will and Eleven in the lounge. They must have already started the film she had bought the boys earlier in the week, she couldn't even remember what it was called... something about aliens? She didn't think she could watch sci-fi after learning of The Upsidedown.

"Evening," she ignored the little flip her heart did at Hopper's voice coming from the kitchen. She could smell dinner cooking, and for the second time that night she couldn't help but smile. It had been a long time since she had smiled this much.

"I see you are cooking the mince I left out," she entered the kitchen to Hopper with a beer in front of him and a cigarette in his hand, a

fresh ash tray set in the middle of the table.

"Spaghetti Bolognaise alright?" He inhaled deeply and she watched his concerned eyes look her up and down. He had already made it clear he thought she was working too much. He never said she *looked* tired – but she knew. She only had to look at her pale face in the mirror every morning, the dark half circles beneath her eyes... she didn't have a choice though. Will and Jonathan needed her, and she needed every cent she could get just to keep them afloat.

"I'm fine, Hopper." She pulled herself out a beer and sat across from him. She took the time to look over his face, he was looking tired too. She supposed he was still adjusting to being the chief of police *and* a father. "How is El?"

"Oh, you know. Going stir crazy, as usual."

"Did she enjoy the books Nancy gave her? And the textbooks the boys lent her?"

"Oh, she's powered through them already, kid is bright. I'll give her that." She took a sip of beer and briefly let herself wonder what it would be like to come home to a man like Jim Hopper every evening. She knew they were both fiery, and nothing would be easy... *But* going back to her earlier thoughts, she didn't like the idea of him caring for another woman like he cared for her and her boys, it just didn't feel right.

Joyce knew she was crazy. She didn't think she was unattractive physically, maybe starting to look a little old... but considering she was nearing 40 that was no surprise. She knew her brain, her crazy anxiety riddled mind was the problem. She could blame Lonnie for most of her mental health problems. "A penny for your thoughts..." She startled, almost forgetting he was there, she had been so lost in her own head.

"Oh," she felt a blush as she realised she couldn't tell him what she had been thinking. "Oh, nothing." She couldn't meet his eyes.

"Uh-huh," he stubbed out his cigarette and held the packet out to her. "Want one? I think dinner is almost ready." He gestured behind him

to the mince simmering on the stove. It smelled delicious, and she felt her stomach grumble in anticipation. She shook her head and gently pushed the packet back towards him.

"I'll set the table."

**TBC**

## 2. Chapter 2

### Chapter Two:

He woke to the light of the television flickering in front of him, the volume muted. He felt a warm body against his and initially thought it was El, that he was back at the cabin with her. But the small body he discovered was Joyce, she had her arms wrapped around him as if she were trying to stop him escaping, but she was still fast asleep. He took a moment to look over her beautiful face, his eyes going down her slight body and down to her bare feet tucked behind her. He knew he would have to disentangle himself so that he could find El. It wasn't right for him to be here with Joyce like this, it was only one step away from something a lot more dangerous.

It wasn't as if he hadn't thought about it. Very far from it, he often found himself reliving his memories of Joyce from their childhood, from their teen years... he sometimes felt himself falling into such a dark mood when he remembered that *he* was the one who fucked that all up. It was *Jim* who left, not Joyce. He left, and Lonnie took his place at her side. That piece of shit.

He hadn't realised until far too late that Lonnie had been abusive to her. He had been dealing with the loss of Sara when a friend of his still in Hawkin's contacted him to let him know Joyce was regularly seen with bruises, black eyes, and even broken bones. They couldn't be sure, but they thought it was a drunken Lonnie causing the damage. He was in no place to save Joyce, his marriage had fallen apart and every day he fought to get through each minute, each hour without falling apart at the seams. He wanted his little girl back more than anything in his life. He had only hoped that Joyce would find the courage to stand up for herself, or that one of her friends would help her escape her horrid marriage.

Jim had also heard she had two children now, two boys. He had met Jonathan on a visit back to Hawkin's, a little boy so opposite to his mother in temperament. Jonathan was reserved and held himself away from the spotlight. No matter whether Joyce had wanted to or not, she had always been a head-turner. Not only was one of the most beautiful women in town, but she had that feistiness, that bearing

that no-one could ignore. Crazy, a lot of people called her crazy. He didn't like that word, it didn't fit her. She was too kind, too caring, and too smart to be 'crazy'. He liked to think of her as different, a unique person – no matter how corny it sounded.

He gently removed Joyce's arms and laid her down on the couch, tucking a cushion beneath her head and tiptoed down the hallway to Will's room. He opened the door a crack and found Will had made a bed of pillows on the floor for himself and El was in his bed. Will was very like his mother and had become a chivalrous young man. He gently closed the door and decided to have a ciggy before rousing his daughter. He tried to slip back through the lounge unnoticed, but Joyce had woken from her slumber and was sitting up on the couch, staring wide-eyed at him.

"What...?" She looked around, her hair mussed up from sleep. He felt a jolt in his gut and tried to tamp down the feeling of arousal. He couldn't. Not Joyce. He had never, ever denied the attraction he felt for her, that would have been impossible. But he was a messed-up person with a fuck tonne of baggage. Joyce had her own problems, it had been why he tried to convince her to date Bob, he was too dangerous for her. Plus he was sure she wouldn't find him as attractive as she once had, he had left after all.

"I think we must have fallen asleep," he gestured to her and the couch. They had – had a fair bit to drink the night before, more than usual.

"Oh," she stood up, looking awkward.

"I'm going to have a ciggy on the step, come with?"

They didn't speak again for a while, but it was still chilly outside, and they had gone from sitting on the front doorstep as far apart as possible – to Joyce sitting with her hip against his. They shared the cigarette, just like old times. He could see her visibly shivering and trying to shake his earlier nefarious thoughts from his mind, he placed an arm around her and tried to share his body heat with hers.

"Hop," he looked down and found himself caught in her gaze. Something flickered there, and he realised that maybe he wasn't the

only one becoming conflicted with the status of their friendship, relationship, or whatever the hell it was. "I think..." she sucked in her lower lip, and suddenly, he lost all self-control, surprising even himself.

He flicked the cigarette onto the damp grass, turned to her, grasped her face between his large hands and kissed her. He kissed her with all the pent up sexual tension, with the love he had *always* had for her, and she kissed him back with as much fervour. They eventually had to stop for lack of oxygen, and she tucked herself against him, much closer this time – allowing him the opportunity to drop a kiss, and then his chin onto the top of her head.

"I'm sorry," he mumbled.

"Sorry for what?" She shifted beneath him to look up at his face. "For kissing me?" She seemed surprised.

"Yeah... I know I'm... not Bob." She chuckled lightly and then stood up.

"It's fucking cold out here, let's go inside and finish this conversation." She held out her hand and he took it, though stood using his own weight as she was so tiny he was sure she wouldn't have the strength to pull him up.

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Joyce snuggled up to him on the couch and tried to calm her nerves. She knew they had finally reached *that* moment. She had to be honest with him and throw caution into the wind. If she didn't tell him now, she never would.

"When you left," she started, watching him wince as if in pain. "I knew I would *never* stop loving you." She studied his face, watching his expression go to one of guilt, and then of pain.

"I thought I was doing the right thing, leaving you here in Hawkin's. You didn't want to come with me, I thought it meant you... didn't love me." He seemed to be uncomfortable saying the word *love*, and suddenly her heart felt full. Fuck, she loved him. She loved how



uncomfortable he was discussing his feelings. That is one thing that had not changed from when they were young, and she had to bite down a chuckle so as not to make this any harder on him. "I always loved you Joyce." He sighed and leaned back into the couch, eyes roving up to the ceiling. "I lost my little girl and though Diane was her mother, it was you I wished were there to comfort me. I thought at first it was our shared history – you knew me from childhood to becoming a young adult." He sighed again. "But when I came back to Hawkin's... I realised that I had never once stopped loving you. I also knew it was too late."

"Too late?" She stiffened. "What do you mean?"

"I didn't come back, even though I knew what Lonnie was doing to you." She saw the anger in his face, and felt a shiver run through her body. She saw him fight his rising temper, and knew it was for her sake. He took a few breaths before continuing. "I had just lost Sara, lost Diane, and I actually thought if I came back and Lonnie was abusing you, that I might kill him. I hoped like shit that your friends would help you escape, but I hear you did that all on your own." She felt her eyes fill with tears and she tried to hide them by tucking her face further into his chest.

"Eventually," she mumbled. "It took me far too long, I didn't think I could raise the boys alone. The realisation that I was already doing it alone, that Lonnie was a drunken fool who gambled all his money away... well I should have realised sooner."

"You shouldn't have had to do that alone, I should have been here."

"I should have visited when I heard about Sara," she sighed. "We both fucked up, Hop,"

"Yeah we did huh?"

"Is it still too late for us?" She felt her voice shake, and realised she was still crying.

"Joyce..." he gave her a squeeze and kissed the top of her head. "I'm not going anywhere, ever again. I'll always be here for you."

"But..." she prompted.

"But, I don't think I'm good for you." He tried to say something else but sudden anger flared within her.

"Don't you think I know what is good for me? Is it because I made a mistake with Lonnie, you think I'm stupid?" She tried to escape his arms, but he tightened them around her and she tried to shove him away.

"Stop," he said calmly, but his forehead crinkling in concern. "Stop it," he said again holding her against him. "I never said that." She stopped fighting and gave in, and he loosened his grip on her.

"I know we both have baggage," she said quietly, all the fight suddenly gone from her. It seemed it was then that he noticed her tears.

"Oh, honey..." he released her and gently thumbed away a few tears, but it was pointless as by now they were streaming down her face. He pulled her back to him and rocked her as she sobbed, she felt all her confusion over Jim and her pain over losing Bob escape her then. She let him rock her until finally she managed to stop.

"Please, Hop. I never thought you would even think of being in a relationship with crazy Joyce. But now that we have reached this point..." she trailed off.

"I don't think you are crazy, not really." He shrugged.

"I didn't want you to be talk of the town, for your reputation to be ruined. I thought you felt the same, that dating me would be embarrassing."

"Joyce, no matter where you go – you turn heads. You are *stunning* you are Joyce fucking Horowitz, every guy wants you." She looked up at him in surprise.

"We aren't teenagers anymore," she laughed.

"I think that you have only become *more* beautiful as you have aged." He placed his hands on either side of her face and bent to give her a

gentle kiss on the lips. "I would feel lucky if you gave me a chance."

"So, you will try? We can try?" She asked, hope bubbling up, her doubts flying away. He gently tilted her face so that she could look into his eyes, and she saw her answer there.

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If someone had told him two years ago – that he would have two teenage children, and one about to head off to college... and that he would be living with Joyce... he would have told them they were batshit crazy.

Maybe he was crazy, maybe he was just dreaming... but considering Joyce had just agreed to marry him – well it was the best dream he had ever had.

**- End.**

Reviews appreciated. Also any story ideas. I think we need to fill with Jopper stories, cos... urgh... they are AMAZING.